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January 30, 1976

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Tenuous Peace in Lebanon

The Syrian-sponsored cease-fire in Lebanon that went into effect on January 22 is being generally respected, despite scattered violations in the Beirut suburbs and the Bekaa Valley. Leaders of the various factions appear to be negotiating seriously, but their inability to agree on the specifics of a political settlement is keeping tensions high. We discuss below some of the negotiating concessions and other steps that the principal parties to the dispute must take to forestall a collapse of negotiations and a renewal of widespread fighting.

Syria

The greatest single danger to the fragile peace in Lebanon is that Syria might too quickly withdraw from Lebanon the approximately 3000 Palestine Liberation Army troops that are now patrolling Muslim areas and encircling the core Christian area of the country. The presence of these PLA forces will be essential for several weeks in order to: (1) keep the pressure on Lebanese Christians to approve and implement a political settlement, (2) prevent the Christians and mainline fedayeen groups from attempting to solidify or extend their control over marginal areas, thus becoming involved in new clashes in Beirut and eastern Lebanon, and (3) intimidate the Palestinian rejectionists and Lebanese radical leftists into foregoing their usual campaign of sniping and kidnaping designed to spark new violence.

Were PLA forces withdrawn quickly or entirely, Christian leaders almost certainly would seek to qualify further the concessions they are now on the verge of making, or to delay implementation of any concessions already made. This could include efforts to postpone implementation of equal representation in parliament for at least a year, or to delay redistribution of executive power until a new president is elected and a new prime minister installed. The

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Christians undoubtedly will be able to delay for several months or even years implementation of any agreed reforms in the economy, administration, and military, if only because of the almost complete collapse of government authority and administrative capability over the last few months.

In addition to keeping a sizable number of PLA troops in Lebanon, Syria will need to continue its heavy pressure on various Lebanese and Palestinian leaders if the current peace is to be maintained. Damascus will have to convince the principal Christian leaders that the encirclement of the Christian core area of Lebanon will continue unless a political compromise is reached, and that the military pressure will be lifted if reforms are implemented.

Syria will also need to convince Lebanese Muslim leaders to settle for basic but limited political reforms rather than push for detailed revisions of the country's constitution and electoral laws as advocated by Socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt. Continued pressure by Damascus on Jumblatt will be essential if he is to accept limited reforms and refrain from backing or inciting violence by the Muslim far left.

To undermine Interior Minister Shamun's argument that the Palestinian problem must be solved before progress can be made on other issues, Damascus will need to offer and follow up on promises to Lebanese Christians that Syria will keep the large Palestinian groups in line. It must then encourage Yasir Arafat to use his forces to prevent rejectionist fedayeen and radicals within the large fedayeen organizations from being drawn into further skirmishes.

Syrian actions to supply or refuse to supply arms to Palestinian and Lebanese leftist forces will in the short run have no significant effect on prospects for peace. Palestinian and leftist forces have enough arms and ammunition already in Lebanon to start and probably sustain a new round of fighting if they choose, and Christian leaders, whatever the facts, will assume that the Syrians are arming the Palestinians and leftists. The Christians will not make any concessions in negotiations on the basis of Syrian promises of restraint in supplying arms to Palestinian or leftist factions.

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Lebanese Christians

To provide any significant chance for continued peace, Lebanese Christians must permit basic, but limited, political and economic reforms. They must accept equal Christian and Muslim representation in parliament, election of the prime minister by parliament, and some redistribution of executive powers that will strengthen the prime minister vis-a-vis the president. The Christians have greater negotiating room on other specific reforms that have been proposed, and perhaps can elicit some concessions from the Muslims in return for endorsing these less important reforms.

In addition to agreeing in principle to political and economic reforms, the Christians must permit the implementation of agreed reforms without unreasonable delay. If the Christians attempt to delay parliamentary reforms until after the expiration of the probable one year extension of the life of the current parliament, for example, renewed fighting is virtually certain. The Christians will be able to postpone meaningful economic reforms, but will have to agree to their implementation in principle and take some superficial steps to demonstrate good faith.

If the current peace should last for several months, parliament, reconstructed or not, will have to face the problem of electing a successor to President Franjiah, whose term expires in September. Christian leaders, to forestall serious fighting, will have to agree to the election of a moderate Christian committed to implementing political reforms. An independent Maronite almost certainly would be acceptable to oldline Muslim leaders and to Jumblatt; a Maronite drawn from either of the two large Christian political parties would not.

In addition to accepting and implementing specific reforms, Lebanese Christian leaders must accept that their private militias will be able to exercise effective control over only the Christian core area of Lebanon. This includes the coastal area from Metn District outside Beirut to Zagharta District near Tripoli. Fighting will certainly start up again if the private Christian militias attempt to assert effective control over mixed districts such as Zahlah, detached Christian districts such as Jazzin, or disputed areas of the capital (Qantari, the hotel district, or some roads connecting Christian enclaves in Beirut to the Christian heartland northeast of the city).

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Although any political compromise likely to be accepted by all parties to the Lebanese dispute will probably include a reaffirmation of Palestinian obligations to respect the Cairo and Melkart agreements, the Palestinians will never obey the letter of the law, and the Christians will have to learn to live with only nominal adherence to it. The Christians can reasonably expect that Lebanese will be allowed unrestricted use of roads near Palestinian refugee camps in the Beirut suburbs, and that some restrictions can be placed on the continued spread of Palestinian squatter compounds from the camps into adjoining areas of the capital. The Christians cannot reasonably expect, however, that they will ever be able to enforce existing restrictions on the kinds or amounts of arms the Palestinians have in the camps, or that they will be able to implement more stringent controls on fedayeen movements in southern Lebanon.

Peace can be maintained in Lebanon without any active support or encouragement for negotiations from the leaders of the country's ultra-conservative Maronite religious and lay groups. If the leaders of these groups can be convinced to refrain from active opposition to limited political concessions and can be convinced to refrain from an active pro-partition campaign among Maronite Christians, it will be possible for leaders of the Phalanges and National Liberal parties to negotiate a political settlement. If the ultra-conservatives were to mount a forceful pro-partition, anti-settlement campaign, however, there is a good chance that they could prevent successful negotiation of a settlement, or, if an accord had already been signed, prevent its implementation.

Lebanese Muslims

To prevent renewed fighting in Lebanon, the country's traditional Muslim leaders must take a number of steps to facilitate negotiations with the Christians. Above all, the Muslims must settle for limited political reforms, such as an even split in parliament and election of the prime minister. If the oldline Muslims press for more extensive Christian concessions such as those demanded by Jumblatt, the Christians will balk and negotiations will stall. This would be very likely to lead to renewed heavy fighting and to an indefinite extension of the PLA presence in Lebanon.

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The Muslims could facilitate negotiations and the implementation of any accord by allowing real or face-saving reciprocal concessions to the Christians even on the basics of a political agreement. To mention examples already raised in the negotiations, these could include approval of the prime minister by something more than a simple majority of parliament, or creation of a bicameral legislature.

Lebanon's oldline Muslims must support Prime Minister Karami at least to the extent that he can speak for all Muslims in endorsing any settlement, and to the extent that he can arrange with the Christians for successful implementation of specific reforms. Prime Minister Karami, who will be continually challenged by radical Muslim leftists and, on many specific issues, by Jumblatt, will need the active backing of Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the principal Palestinian leaders to follow through on any political agreement.

Karami must arrange with the Syrians to have ready a plan for the phased withdrawal of PLA troops from Lebanon if a political agreement is reached. To make believable to Lebanese Christians that the country's Muslims are not depending on the PLA to win their political concessions, Karami must make clear that he favors scheduled withdrawal of the PLA and its replacement by units of the Lebanese army and internal security force. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Karami must agree to the extensive use of army troops to police Beirut and all areas where Christian and Muslim areas of Lebanon join.

Like the traditional Muslim leaders, Kamal Jumblatt must agree to accept limited reforms rather than insist on detailed revisions of Lebanon's constitution and electoral laws, as he would prefer. Jumblatt is important far beyond the numbers of his political followers or his own private militia. If he supports the radical Lebanese left in opposing a peace settlement arranged by Karami, the leftists and their Palestinian allies would probably be able to undermine the settlement and spark new violence. Without the support of Jumblatt and the political legitimacy he provides, the far left probably could not subvert an agreement.

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Palestinians

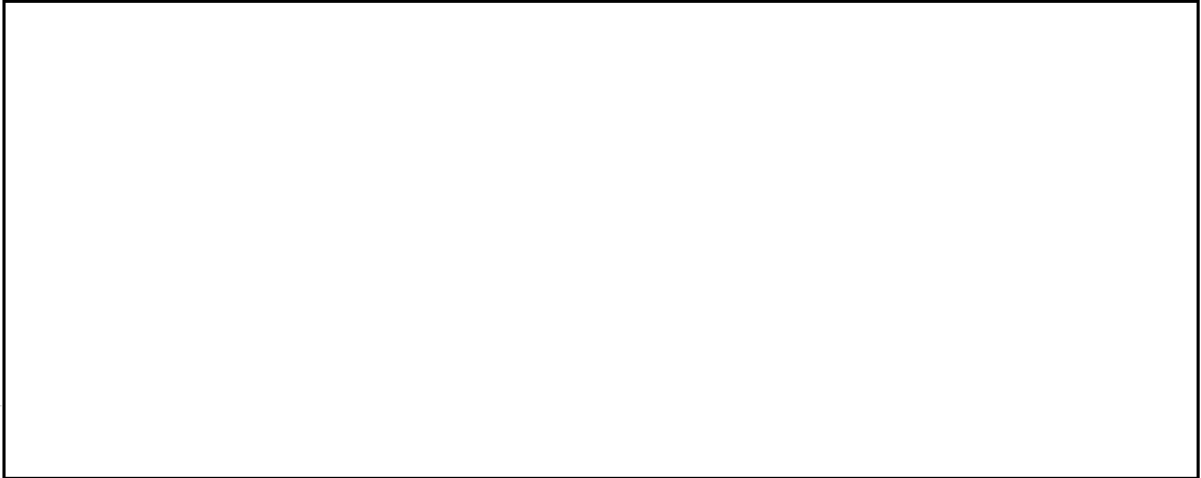
The major Palestinian fedayeen groups' chief responsibility in maintaining the current tenuous peace is to demonstrate that they will use force to put down violations of the cease-fire by Palestinian rejectionists and Lebanese radical leftists, who usually operate in Muslim or mixed-areas of Beirut now under Palestinian control. Once the Palestinians demonstrated such a willingness to use force, it is likely that little force would be required. If the main Palestinian groups force the rejectionists to respect their own hardly believable commitment to observe the cease-fire, it will not be necessary that they also stop supplying arms to the radicals. A large part of the influence that the major Palestinian groups have over the radicals, in fact, derives from their practice of supplying arms to them; if the arms were cut off, the influence would drop to virtually nothing, and Libyan and Iraqi influence would grow even more.

For peace to be maintained, the major fedayeen groups must hold to their past practice of avoiding clashes with the private Christian militias whenever possible. It is likely that extremists on all sides will seek to draw the Palestinians and Christians into renewed firefights, and imperative that Yasir Arafat and Zuhayr Muhsin continue to prevent radicals within Fatah and Saiga from responding with force. Perhaps most important, it will become necessary that Fatah's Yarmuk Force and the large Saiga units now present in the Bekaa Valley withdraw to Syria when the PLA forces withdraw. Lebanese Christians are upset at the PLA presence, but confident at least that PLA forces are under Syrian control. If large units of Fatah and Saiga show signs that they intend to remain after the PLA has departed, Lebanese Christians will be likely to attempt some action to push them out of areas of mixed population such as Zagharta and Zahlah districts.

The Palestinians need to make no significant negotiating concessions to the Lebanese Christians. Feigned respect for the Cairo and Melkart agreements would probably suffice, if at the same time the fedayeen allowed unobstructed Christian use of all major roads and highways in Beirut and did not interfere with the Lebanese army as it moves back into positions in southern Lebanon. Prospects for continued peace would be aided considerably if mainline Palestinian forces will agree to ensure the safety of any Christians desiring to return to Damour or the Christian villages south of Beirut.

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International Involvement

Efforts by the UN or foreign states other than Syria to mediate the Lebanese dispute have little chance of success, whether or not the current Syrian initiative succeeds. Diplomatic moves by other states probably will be effective in preserving the present peace only to the extent that they encourage the Lebanese Christians to cooperate with the Syrian peace initiative, and to the extent that they encourage the Syrians to continue the mediation process until agreement is reached.

International efforts to choke off the flow of arms to the Lebanese Christians probably will have little impact. The Christians almost certainly have sufficient arms and ammunition to fight again if they wish, and would see a serious international effort to obstruct the flow of arms as a threat that should be met with greater obstinacy rather than with greater concessions. The Christians will be persuaded to make greater concessions only in the extremely unlikely event that an effective arms embargo is implemented.

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